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SUBJECT: TURKISH POLITICIANS USE PKK AMNESTY REMARKS TO
PUSH BACK AT MILITARY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANICE G. WEINER FOR REASONS 1.4(B),
(D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Turkish political leaders are using True Path Party (DYP) leader Mehmet Agar's recent calls for PKK militants to abandon violence and engage in politics to curry favor with undecided voters who will play a crucial role in Turkey's 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections. Agar's hard-line, anti-terrorism reputation as Interior Minister in the 1990s gives him the standing to tackle the issue. TGS Chief General Buyukanit responded sharply over the weekend to Agar's PKK comments and remarks Agar later made about limiting the military's political influence. In contrast, PM Erdogan, FM Gul and Motherland (ANAVATAN) party leader Erkan Mumcu each reacted positively, to differing degrees, to Agar's remarks. In so doing, they laid down two markers: they want to appear engaged in pursuing a political solution to ending the PKK violence, and they have drawn a line between their views and those of the Turkish military. End summary.

¶2. (C) Center-right DYP Chairman Agar's recent call for PKK fighters to relinquish violence and engage in politics, coupled with his slap at the military's political influence, has sparked a heated exchange with General Buyukanit. Agar relied on his strong (and often controversial) anti-PKK credentials, having served as Interior Minister and Turkish National Police Chief during the violent crackdown against the PKK in the 1990s, to try to bolster his image as a national leader and reach out to voters, including those in Turkey's southeast, eager for an end to the PKK threat.

¶3. (SBU) During his meetings in Germany this weekend, Agar elaborated on recent remarks he made in Turkey's southeast, pledging that he would eliminate the terrorist threat and work for peaceful coexistence, should he become prime minister (DYP will be lucky to cross the 10 percent electoral threshold). A DYP-led government would not need to rely on the military to resolve the PKK problem, the way the current government has, Agar said. His comment that politics cannot be made using the military generated a predictably caustic response from General Buyukanit on October 14, who also condemned Agar's earlier appeal as an unacceptable call for a general PKK amnesty. Buyukanit vowed that the military would continue to fight the PKK until no armed terrorist is left. The CHOD also made a derogatory reference to families of PKK militants, a first in creating guilt by association, and, in a veiled reference, implicitly slammed Agar for his presumed

responsibility for one particularly dirty part of the 1990s conflict -- the so-called "mystery killings".

¶4. (SBU) Buyukanit's response led ANAVATAN leader Mumcu, along with several Turkish commentators, to criticize the military's interference in politics. FM Gul joined the fray on his way to an October 16 meeting in Luxembourg with the EU Troika, telling the press that there was no need for polemics, but adding that Agar's comments should be carefully evaluated, given his experience on security issues and as Interior Minister. In an October 16 front page Hurriyet interview, PM Erdogan took a cautious approach: he appealed to nationalists (Agar's stronghold) by endorsing the military's determined stance against the PKK and labeled Agar's call for dialogue premature. Republic People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal was left to slam Agar's proposals and trumpet the conventional response of condemning any overture to the PKK.

¶5. (C) Comment. Agar is one of the few Turkish leaders who credibly can raise the amnesty issue or comment on the military's political activities. Neither in government nor in parliament, he may have thought himself below the military's radar. He may also genuinely see himself as best positioned to solve the PKK problem, or he may be using the issue to bolster his image as a peacemaker with undecided voters who are likely to decide next year's elections. Whatever his reasons, he has succeeded in opening debate on a previously taboo subject. AKP and ANAVATAN falling in behind DYP's proposal to "eliminate the PKK's will to use guns" using peaceful means creates an unusual alignment of politicians versus the military. In today's charged, nationalist climate, anything that challenges the military's central role in the PKK conflict -- potentially preparing the

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public for alternative approaches -- is significant. It is also another sign that it is no longer politics as usual in Turkey. End comment.

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